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HOME HEROICS.

JUDGING by the prevalent choice of subject among our High Art painters, we should imagine that the worth and dignity of humanity had perished, and that we must be for ever raising monuments in commemoration of their former existence. Not a painter scarcely dreams of finding a noble subject in his own times. Men who aim at painting *great* pictures must turn their faces backward, and journey a century or two, at least, into the mists through which the past looms up, greater than itself—mighty, only because incomprehensible—more dignified, because its faults have become obscured.

It is a curse to us perpetually—this disposition to look abroad and back for things worthy of reverence and study. It may be hopeless—we confess to something like despair thinking of it—to attempt to induce our countrymen to look near home for their ideals. Yet, hopeless as it is, on it depends the prospect of all future greatness for our Art. It is impossible that the race should have so changed, that the deeds of to-day should be less noble than those of three hundred years ago. And yet to such a conclusion would the practice of Art at this day lead: for true it is that an artist, desiring to enter what is generally known as the High Art field, rarely, if ever, takes for his subject a modern incident.

If it be not true that the race has lost its former worth, there is no other alternative than that Art is a thing of the surface merely—dealing with religious garbs and historical costumes. To admit this, is to abandon all claim for it as a moral agent, and make the Artist, after all, only a minister to the sensuous nature. We cannot willingly take such a position, since it follows, as a consequence, that Art is folly, and its worshippers, idlers. There is a vitality—an immortality—in it, though ages may overlook its messages, and leave it in degradation; and it is due to the world that the philosopher—the moralist—the statesman—do their part in giving it its birthright.

We acknowledge all the objections that can be urged against a modern standard of heroism on the score of costume—we are willing to admit that it would be difficult to conceive a beautiful or dignified figure

in our nineteenth century costume, but it is not in the power of such trifles to destroy a noble conception—true genius will ride over them, and even accomplish its ends seemingly by their aid. But, if our mere externals so limit the range of Art, then Art must mould those externals to suit it—it must change the costume, the habits, and the surroundings of men.

And if this, which we believe to be easy, were impossible, still it must be felt that the true end of Art is the expression of the inner nature—the characteristics of the soul. It must be felt that there is a Beauty which will shine through all externals, and will insist on being seen through rags even, and the representation of this will make Art noble and worthy, without regard to forms or material appearances. The true Artistic Beauty will redeem even an ugly garb in which it may chance to be dressed, and to those who are capable of seeing through its disguises, will sanctify the homeliest guise.

The true secret of the attainment of High Art, then, is not in the draping of models, but in the education of our inner selves to the perception of that which is noblest and most beautiful in the soul of man—the god-like and heavenly. The artist has learned the secret of that attainment when he has made his own soul noble and beautiful, for only then can he see the nobility and beauty in others. We shall never make a grand school of Art, by sending artists where they have facilities for studying middle-age costumes, or the habits of the so-called heroic ages, but by our artists becoming lofty in their natures, and conscientious in their labors and regards both of Nature and Art. That is the highest Art which tells the grandest truths, and the grandest truths will be told by the grandest souls, without regard to age or locality.

There is a heroism in the commonest true life worthy an Art mightier than that of Phidias—subjects more fraught with high and holy meaning than any the Middle Age has given us, in the history of every suffering, aspiring heart. Sorrows are thrown before our eyes every day, if we were capable of reading them, which would benefit the world for ever if once well told; and no man can be a true artist without finding in his own history that which better satis-

fies the definition of heroism than the actions of Greek or Crusader. They are Home Heroics that touch and better the heart—that Art which most humbly goes down into the depths of our poor human heart is the highest, best.

Letters

ON LANDSCAPE PAINTING.

LETTER IV.

"You had better learn to make shoes," said the venerable Colonel Trumbull, one day, to a stripling who was consulting him in reference to his choice of painting as a profession, "better learn to make shoes or dig potatoes than to become a painter in this country." I felt that this was a harsh repulse to the young man, and most unexpected from such an authority. I was not then a painter, but secretly hoping to become one. I felt a strong sympathy for the victim, and thought he was unkindly treated, but I can now imagine that there might have appeared to the mind of the veteran artist sufficient ground for such advice, and that it may have been an act of kindness rather than severity. It is better to make shoes, or dig potatoes, or follow any other honest calling to secure a livelihood, than seek the pursuit of Art for the sake of gain. For whoever presumes to embrace her with the predominant motive of pecuniary reward, or any mere worldly distinction, will assuredly find but a bundle of reeds in his arms. The great law that provides for the sustenance of the soul through the ministry of spiritual things, has fixed an immovable barrier between its own pursuits and those which supply our physical wants. For this reason, we cannot serve God and mammon, however specious our garb of hypocrisy; and I would sooner look for figs on thistles than for the higher attributes of Art from one whose ruling motive in its pursuit is money. This is one of the principal causes operating to the degradation of Art, perverting it to the servility of a mere trade; and next to this, is its prostitution by means of excess in color, strong effects and skillful manipulation, solely for the sensuous gratification of the eye. Through such motives the Art becomes debased, and a picture so painted, be its subject landscape or figure, may well be considered but an empty decoration. But, fortunately for Art, such is not its true purpose, and it is only through the religious integrity of motive by which all real Artists have ever been actuated, that it still preserves its original purity, impressing the mind through the visible forms of material beauty, with a deep sense of the invisible and immaterial, for which end all this world's beauty and significance, beyond the few requirements of our animal nature,